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A REPLY TO THE OBJECTIONS

OF THE

REV. MR. OSBORNE,

MINISTER OF

DARLINGTON STREET CHAPEL, WOLVERHAMPTON.

BY J. BELL,

AN ELDER OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS.

Being the Substance of a Sermon delivered in the Saints' Room, St. James's Square.

1 THESSALONIANS, v. 21.

BELOVED BRETHREN AND SISTERS,

Most of you are already aware, from some hints which were thrown out this morning, that I purpose replying to the objections which were raised against our views of baptism by the Rev. Mr. Osborne, in his sermon of this morning to the congregation in Queen-street. My discourse will therefore be rather controversial; notwithstanding, I trust that the spirit in which I shall reply to his objections will be that of truth, humility, and love, and that my remarks may savour of that charity which hopeth and believeth all things. I am inclined to believe, and would therefore sincerely hope, for his own veracity's sake, and for that only, that the rev. gentleman's objections are the offspring of a candid and impartial mind: nevertheless, when I reflect upon the old adage, which says, "even good men may be deceived," and daily see its truth developed, I am induced to believe that sincerity and infallibility are not so inseparably connected as might be desired.

The scripture which I have chosen as a text will be found in 1st Thess. v. 21, "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." And here I would observe, before proceeding further, that text-taking is neither a divine institution nor an apostolic custom, but was introduced in the third century by Origen; he too it was who introduced the vile system of spiritualizing the scriptures, so that a mystical meaning, or fanciful interpretation, was preferred before the obvious meaning of words and phrases: * and it is only to comply with a popular custom, where I can conscientiously do so, lest by the neglect of it I should unwillingly offend my hearers, that I now take a text.

In the words of our text we have the apostle's injunction to the saints of his day to investigate carefully all that they heard, and to avoid relying too much upon the mere authority of the speaker. I would therefore earnestly impress upon your minds the necessity of

* Stromata, book x.

giving heed to the apostle's advice, which, though especially addressed to the church at Thessalonica, is equally applicable to all people, in any age of the world, inasmuch as it conveys a general principle, which if observed cannot fail to be productive of the most beneficial and lasting results; and I would say, both to saints and sinners, put away all prejudice, and let the balances of your minds be duly adjusted, that your judgements may be decided by the ponderance of truth.

I shall first call your attention to Mr. Osborne's text, which you will find in the 16th of Acts, 33rd verse, where the account is given of the baptism of the Phillipian jailor. From the occurrence of the words "*all his*" and "*and all his house*" in this account, Mr. Osborne drew the unwarrantable conclusion, and in plain terms declared, "here then is infant baptism;" but it will be seen from a perusal of the 32nd and 34th verses that there were no infants in the jailor's household, for the word was *preached to all*, and *all believed*, which would not be true if infants are included in the signification of the word "all." To preach to infants would be absurd, and for infants to understand or believe would be impossible. Neither can Mr. Osborne support the idea of infant baptism by quoting the words "suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not," &c. 19th Matt. 14th verse, for there is not in these words the most distant allusion to baptism of any kind; on the contrary, the purpose for which they were brought to Jesus is plainly stated, namely, "*that he should put his hands on them, and pray,*" and not (as Mr. Osborne would have us understand) *to be baptised.* A few verses were quoted by Mr. Osborne from 17th Genesis, beginning at the 4th verse. His application of these verses was on this wise—that as the law of circumcision was enforced upon its subjects in their infancy as the most proper period, so should the ordinance of baptism in the gospel scheme; this I utterly deny, for the following reasons:—

1.—There is not a single passage which, when properly applied, at all favours the idea.

2.—If infant baptism was substituted in the place of infant circumcision, there is then *a change only*, without any advantage resulting therefrom; for if the law of circumcision was unprofitable because not of faith, infant baptism must be so for the same reason: infants are equally as unable to believe in or understand the latter covenant as they are the former.

3.—The purpose of each was diverse from the other. Circumcision was the *seal* of a covenant or promise then made, to be fulfilled at a *future* period, which becomes of no use when the promise has been fulfilled: whereas baptism is for the express purpose of *conveying* unto us, in the *present* act of its administration, the remission of our sins. (*a*)

4.—Circumcision was of one sex only, baptism is of both. (*b*)

5.—Baptism is adminstered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; which was not the case with circumcision. (*c*)

6.—In baptism no age is fixed upon by Jesus or the Apostles as the

a Mark, i. 4; Luke, iii. 3; Acts. ii. 38; Acts, xxii. 16; 1 Peter, iii. 21.
b Gen. xvii. 12: Acts, viii. 12.
c Matt. xxviii. 19.

most proper period; whereas the eighth day after birth was expressly commanded for circumcision. (*d*)

7.—We read that the ancient Jews "were baptized unto Moses, in the cloud, and in the sea." (*e*) Here, therefore, was baptism observed at the same time that circumcision was in force, which is inconsistent with the idea of the one superseding the other. It may be asked, "why were both ordinances observed during the Mosaic dispensation, and only that of baptism in the Christian?" I reply, that the gospel was preached unto the people of that day as well as unto those of the apostolic age, "but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it," (*f*) therefore "*the law was added because of transgression.*" (*g*) Hence the law and the gospel were in force at the same time, and the ordinance of circumcision, being incorporated with the law, was performed upon infants eight days old, who on arriving at the age of accountability could then be baptized for the remission of their sins: but when the seed (Jesus Christ) came, to whom the promise was made, then the seal of that promise (circumcision) was no longer necessary. (*h*) The observance of both ordinances during the same dispensation still further proves that the nature and purpose of each differed from the nature and purpose of the other, for if they had been similar in these respects there would have been no need for both at the same time. From these and other reasons it is plain that there is no analogy between the two ordinances, and therefore no argument can be drawn from the former to substantiate infant baptism.

The next passage which Mr. Osborne adduced in support of the absurd theory is the 39th verse of 2nd Acts, but this also fails to prove the point, for children are not necessarily infants, any more than a woman is a man because she is of the same species, or a groat a guinea because it is coin; you and I and all the world are children of some parents, nevertheless we are not all infants.

Our objector continued his argument, (if it may be called one,) by asking a question, in which he supposes, (though without any reason,) that if infants are not baptized they are necessarily cut off from any participation in the benefits of the atonement; why he should think so I cannot tell, but I will attribute it to the "sadly deficient view" which he has taken "of the love of God with respect to infants," as it is more charitable than the supposition that he had intended to cast upon us the odium of an opinion most erroneous in itself, and not in the least degree countenanced by us. His words were, "if infants were cut off, why were they cut off? it must have been either in mercy or judgement; in mercy it could not be." This is quite true; but why suppose they were cut off at all? the scriptures do not teach it, neither do the Latter Day Saints; on the contrary, the scriptures bear record, and we believe, that as much as was lost by Adam's transgression so much we regain by the atonement of Christ; or in other words, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (*i*) Hence, neither infants nor adults have need of baptism until they themselves

d Gen. xvii. 12. *e* 1 Cor. x. 1, 2. *f* Heb. iii. 16, 19; Heb. iv. 2.
g Gal. iii. 19. *h* Gal iii. 19; 1Cor. vii. 18, 19; Gal. v. 2-6. *i* 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22; Rom. v. 18, 19.

become actual transgressors, but when this is the case, and we have been awakened to a sense of our sad condition, we can then joyfully avail ourselves of the ordinances of the house of God, and, by being born of water and the spirit, become new creatures in Christ Jesus, inasmuch as we believe the gospel, and do heartily renounce our sins. Mr. Osborne next cited the authority of one of the (so called) fathers of the church. His words are as follow: "Irenæus, who was acquainted with Polycarp, and he with St. John, tells us that it (infant baptism) was practised in the early ages from the days of the apostles." This may be true, for many errors besides this were taught and practised very early; in fact, the "mystery of iniquity" commenced its operations as early as the days of St. Paul, (*j*) and it is probable that the Apostle made use of the words of our text in view of these very heresies. The antiquity of errors is no proof of their truth, and if Irenæus is the best authority on this point, then bad is the best, for the very same Irenæus gravely informs us of a false fact, in stating that when the Harlot Rahab concealed the three spies, she concealed the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*. (*k*) Many other absurd ideas were entertained by these ancient writers, and as for unanimity there is none to be expected from them. Origen is frequently quoted in support of infant baptism, but I think his testimony will have very little weight with any one who is acquainted with his inconsistent ideas on other subjects; for instance, he says that "the Holy Spirit was *created* by the Son, by the word." (*l*) Another of these notable characters (St. Chrysostom, I believe) says that in a certain country where he had been he there saw people with only *one eye*, which was in the *centre* of their foreheads, and moreover, that they carried their heads *under their arms!* So much for the ancient fathers.

Mr. Osborne continued by making an assertion of the correctness of which he himself seemed to be doubtful. Said he, "not until the sixth, if not the tenth century, were there any dissents from this opinion." Now if Mr Osborne is no more certain upon this particular than to be doubtful whether it was in the sixth or the tenth century that dissents concerning this doctrine took place, it would have been better policy to have avoided making the assertion at all; however he seems to have quite overlooked the fact that infant baptism was disputed as early as the third century. (*m*)

Our divine endeavoured to draw a comparison between infant baptism and the oath of allegiance, but in this comparison he failed most signally; he said, "the oath of allegiance, does it not bind the children also? if the parents take the oath, do they not take it *for* their children as well?" And again, "it would be absurd to suppose that the children when arrived at manhood should take a fresh oath." Here, observe, the first parallel would exempt children from baptism when young or in their infancy, because their parents' baptism *served for them*, as did the parental oath; and the second would exclude them from it when of a riper age, because, as Mr. O. would have it, such a thing would be absurd. When, then, are they to be baptised? According to Mr. Osborne's comparison they never would, and so far from supporting infant baptism, this comparison actually confutes it.

The next objection raised by our divine was that "no advocate of adult baptism can find any prohibition of *infant baptism*." I reply neither is

j 2 Thess. ii. 7. *k* Book iv. ch. 34. *l* 1 Part on St. John. *m* Mosheim, vol. 1. p. 85.

there any prohibition of *infant communion*, nor of the absurd practice of *baptising bells*, (a custom formerly observed in those countries where Popery prevailed). If the absence of a direct and definite prohibition of infant baptism be a sufficient warranty for its observance, then we shall have equally good reasons for *infant communion*. It is clear that Mr. Osborne's argument proves either too much, or nothing at all.

Our rev. objector's next argument was as follows: "they say, 'he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved'; now this argument would carry them to this, if they cannot believe they cannot be saved." Here Mr. Osborne not only seems to have forgotten that these were the words of Jesus, merely quoted by us, but he also assumes that we believe in infants *having faith* and *being baptised*, which is not the case. He endeavours also to make it appear that his conclusion is deducible from our own views of baptism; but let me once for all state that as a full, free, and sufficient atonement was made for original sin, so infants are not under condemnation on that account, and having committed no sins themselves they have no need of baptism for the remission of any. The error consists in applying the words in question to the case of infants. (*n*)

Mr. Osborne next says, that "immersion cannot be the order of God, because it will not meet the case of every one." How, says he, "can any one be immersed in a desert, where there is little or no water?" How, indeed! say I, not at all; but as there are no inhabitants except travellers in such deserts, and these never stay long on this very account, they would soon travel on their camels and dromedaries to a place where there was sufficient water; indeed we have the account of St. John doing so for this very reason. (*o*) As to the impossibility of baptising in the Polar regions, I would state that those parts of the Polar regions which are inhabited are not destitute of a sufficiency of unfrozen water wherein they could baptise; even if they were, the inhabitants, travelling as they do with great swiftness upon the ice, sometimes by means of skates and at others with sledges, would soon arrive at water of such a temperature as would admit of baptism being administered with even a considerable degree of comfort. Mr. Osborne says, that "Immersion is a dangerous mode," but it is proved by the experience of millions that it is not more pregnant with danger than benefit. In fact, a few minutes or seconds immersion in cold water in any season of the year is highly beneficial, and is strongly recommended by the faculty. As for the possibility of accidents, this would be the result of *carelessness*, and not of the *mode of baptism*.

The following passages were next quoted in favour of sprinkling:—"I will pour out my *spirit* upon him that is thirsty;" "the *Holy Ghost* fell upon them;" "*I* will sprinkle clean water upon you." (*p*) With regard to the first two passages I will simply observe that they have no reference whatever to baptism, but to the Holy Spirit alone; neither has the latter any allusion to this ordinance, which will the plainer appear upon a perusal of the context, from which we gather, first—that the event is still future, inasmuch as the houses of Israel are not yet gathered to their own land, for in the 25th verse we are informed that *then* is the time when this sprinkling will take place. It is evident therefore, that if it referred

n Mark, xvi. 16. *o* John, iii. 23. *p* Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25.

to baptism we are all baptizing considerably *before* the time specified; secondly, from the grammatical construction of the passage, we learn that whenever it is fulfilled, *God himself* will be the agent. From these reasons it is plain that the sprinkling here spoken of does not refer to baptism. If it did, then the example of Jesus, and the practice of the apostles, would be utterly at variance with the passage in question, inasmuch as they baptized by immersion (a fact which can be proved both by the scriptures and history), whereas the passage in Ezekiel's prophecy speaks of sprinkling.

Mr. Osborne next observed that "the Greek word—*baptizo*, has 23 different significations, such as *dip*, *plunge*, or *immerse*." But how does this support the idea of sprinkling? Not at all; any one in his senses will perceive that it is fatal to it, and instead of being an argument against us, it is one in our favour. He further said "then great stress is laid upon 4 Greek prepositions; 1,411 times those prepositions are used in such a manner as to favour sprinkling." This I shall meet by observing that it is a gross error; the result of a most torturous perversion and misapplication of scripture language, strained to support a point which has no foundation in Holy Writ. Mr. Osborne continued by observing that "if these Greek prepositions must mean *into* and *in*, in one case, they must in another, and then we must believe in the absurdity that Jesus actually went *into* the mountain, instead of *on to* it. It will be perceived from this, that his intention was to set aside these words, so that they should not favour immersion; but I will now act upon his suggestion, and apply the rule the other way, and we shall then see that his argument in this case is equally as futile as the preceding ones.

According to Mr. Osborne, if these prepositions must have a certain meaning in one case they must have the same meaning in all other cases; if, therefore, *on to* and *on* be the proper meanings of these prepositions in one case they must be so in another; then we must understand that Joseph was laid *on* a pit, and there was no water *on* the pit; instead of Uzziah going *into* the temple, we must understand that he went *on to* it; we must also read that Noah went *on to* the ark, instead of *into* it; our father who art *on* heaven, instead of *in* heaven. Some may say, "how then, when reading the scriptures, are we to know which interpretation is right, since the Greek word is capable of both?" I answer, the nature of the case will always decide; for the nature of a mountain is such that no one in taking a walk need go *into* or right under the soil to do so; whereas the nature of baptism is an *immersion* of the body in water.

The next objection was that the 3,000 could not have been *immersed* in one day. But let us bring facts to bear upon the case:—Elder J. Clinton, president of the Birmingham Conference, on one occasion baptized 39 in 40 minutes; at this rate, the 12 Apostles alone could have baptized them all in 4 hours 17 min. and as they commenced early in the morning, (soon after 9 o'clock), they could have had intervals of rest, so as not to experience any inconvenience from continuing in the water long at a time; moreover the apostles, being fishermen and other like occupations, were no doubt inured to hardships, and especially exposed to the elements, and were therefore prepared for such occasions as the one in question. But we have good reason to conclude that the 12 apostles were not the

only administrators in this great baptism; for in Acts, ii. 1, we are informed that they were *all in one place*, the number being 120, Acts i. 15. Of this number no doubt the 70 whom Jesus had commissioned formed a part, and it is very unlikely that they would remain as idle spectators; therefore, taking these into the number of administrators, the 3,000 could have been baptized in half an hour.

Mr. Osborne next said that "the 3rd, 4th, and 5th verses of the 6th of Romans have a reference to something altogether spiritual, because there is no similarity or point of comparison between the *baptism* of a believer and the *death* of Christ." This is quite true; surely Mr. Osborne must have known better than to think that we endeavour to draw a comparison between a *baptism* and a *death;* but this is one among the many absurd things that men will say and endeavour to apply to us, in order to make their own case appear good. However, let me tell Mr. Osborne, that the comparison lies in the *burial* and *baptism*, both of these implying, in their very nature, a complete *overwhelming* or *covering* of the body; and St. Paul, in these very verses, makes an allusion to the *mode* of baptism by comparing it to the *burial* of Christ, as it is written, "we are *buried* with him by *baptism* unto death, that *like as* he was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so should we also walk in newness of life." And again, "if we have been *planted* together in the *likeness* of his death we shall be also in the *likeness* of his resurrection." Among those who have written upon this subject, and have understood these verses to have allusion to the *mode* of *baptism*, I may mention Grotius, Hall, Whitby, Schudder, Saurin, Newton, Davenant, Luther, Calvin, and many others, so that *we* are not alone in our view of the meaning of these verses.

The next objection was that "baptism by water is the sign of baptism of the spirit;" but for this there is not the least shadow of evidence, and on that account Mr. Osborne did not adduce any. If it were true, and I were to draw the analogy correctly, I should say, in Mr. Osborne's own words, "if we are no longer under the influence of the Spirit, than we are under the influence of the water, it is a very poor affair indeed, and of very little assistance towards our salvation."

Mr. Osborne then related an anecdote of a Baptist who told him that he believed some of his (the Baptist's) children were lost and others were saved. In commenting upon which our rev. objector said, "If baptism gives a man such super-horrible views of the destiny of his own family, God deliver me from such." Here Mr. Osborne falls into the vulgar practice of substituting clap-trap for argument, and of attaching to others the ill consequences of a belief they do not hold. Here, observe, the Baptist could have had no allusion to baptism, when saying the words which Mr. Osborne repeated, because he of course did not believe in infant baptism: therefore the cause of his doubts must be found elsewhere, and that will be in the doctrine of *predestination*, which is held very strictly by many of the Baptists.

Our divine next quoted the words "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything but a new creature," just as if baptism was meant. Any one will perceive that it is circumcision, and not baptism that is here spoken of, unless he be blind or unable to read.

"If you break the law your baptism is of no use," said Mr. Osborne; but I suspect that even some of those whom Mr. Osborne himself has baptized are not quite infallible; in fact, this we can gather from their own words, even in their most pious moments, when they will acknowledge that they are "miserable sinners." Hence their baptism is of no use, any more than any one's else, according to Mr. Osborne's own words. But is it not written that "if we *confess* our sins, he his faithful and just to *forgive* us, and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness?" And, again, are we not enjoined to pray that God will *forgive* us our tresspasses? It is possible that persons who have been baptized, and have entered into covenant with God, may sin and be overtaken in faults, but still their baptism *has been*, and still is of use, as an initiatory ordinance, and as an ordinance for the remission of sins that are past; and being by this ordinance made the adopted sons and daughters of God they are entitled to greater lenity, and more free forgiveness, inasmuch as they repent and do not wilfully persevere in sin. We have an High Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Having tried all Mr. Osborne's objections by right reason, and found them wanting in power to overturn the truth, let us hold fast the conclusion that *adult baptism by immersion for the remission of sins* is still unshaken, and is firmly founded on the word of God. Being a principle of truth it is therefore mighty, and truth being mighty it must prevail.

I would therefore exhort all within the hearing of my voice to make no delay, but "*arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord,*" so shall you have the witness of the Spirit, by which you shall also come in possession of principles and power so as to overcome and prevail, and be enabled to endure unto the end, which principles and power I beseech my Heavenly Father to bestow more abundantly upon his Saints, and though they be a little lower than the Angels, to crown them with loving-kindness and everlasting joy, and may the peace of God for ever dwell in your bosoms for the Redeemer's sake. *Amen.*

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